



Policy Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic

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III. INVITATION

I. INTRODUCTION

The Government of the Slovak Republic is coming before the National Council of the Slovak Republic and all citizens with a programme, in which it identifies its goals and commits itself to work in the best interests of our motherland.

In the preceding period, the Slovak Republic passed a great portion of the path in the development of a democratic constitutional system, civil rights guarantees, market economy and international status. Based on the mandate from the September elections and building upon the previous government's efforts, the Government of the Slovak Republic is presenting a programme that is a new impetus for the development of our motherland and that will provide a European future for Slovakia and its citizens.

The Slovak Republic is standing at the threshold of historic times. The Government is determined and prepared to take decisive steps – in co-operation with all citizens – that will definitively bring Slovakia to the community of European democracies and make it a member of the EU and NATO. Our programme is a plan ensuring that Slovakia will seize the great opportunity and take an honourable, respectful and responsible position in the European community.

The Government is aware of the content of the mandate from the electorate. We intend to be an effective and realistic government and our programme is a plan to resolve Slovakia's problems, a programme of necessary reforms and effort to achieve a better functioning of the state.

In its efforts and in the implementation of this programme, the Government will encourage any honest civic and economic activity, so that Slovakia becomes a country where decency, honesty and responsibility pay back.

II. THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAMME

1. DEMOCRATIC STATE

The Slovak Republic has overcome the period when doubt was cast on its democratic institutions and democratic freedoms were threatened. The September elections confirmed the solidity of the Slovak Republic's democratic foundations. The Government undertakes to continue to guarantee civil freedoms and comprehensive development of human rights.

The Government's principal endeavour in the forthcoming period will be to ensure effective, slim and not expensive state, reduce bureaucracy in state administration, de-bureaucratise and modernise public administration and complete the public administration reform. The Government will carry out a revision of all structures, prepare changes in labour law legislation and reorganise state administration.

The Government will step up its efforts and create conditions for a more effective fight against corruption. It will continue to implement the national programme and adopt new measures in legislative, institutional and organisational areas. It will assess the anti-corruptive dimension of its decisions as a priority and simultaneously encourage the public's co-operation and responsibility in the fight against corruption on a society-wide basis.

The Government will propose the adoption of a constitutional act on the conflict of interests, reduction of the scope of immunities of constitutional officials, as well as acts concerning the rules of lobbying and property origin verification.

The Government will propose the modification of election rules in order to increase the number of election districts, permit participation by private electronic media in the election campaign, increase the weight of preferential votes and enable citizens of the Slovak Republic to vote abroad.

The Government will complete and present a draft act on elections to the European Parliament, so that the Slovak Republic is prepared to elect its MEPs in the first half of 2004.

The Government is aware of the multiethnic character of the Slovak society; it therefore commits itself to countering all forms of intolerance. The Government undertakes to apply the approved provisions of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. The Government will prepare a draft act on minorities, which will also deal with the financing of minority cultures.

The Government sees the resolution of the Roma issue as a matter of priority and will continue to support specific development programmes and provide appropriate funding to ensure that the situation and integration of Roma into the society improve. The Government will deliver a continuation of the strategy to address the situation of the Roma community and complete the expert and specific capacities directly in regions with large Roma populations in the interest of reinforcing the efficiency of implementation of individual objectives. The Government will continue to implement successful projects in the field of education, culture, housing and infrastructure, as well as in the social area, while paying attention to the aspects of harmonic co-existence between Roma and non-Roma citizens.

The Government is aware of the importance of strengthening moral values in our society. In this context, it relies on effective support from the church. The Government will use

its contacts with churches on the basis of mutual respect and a balanced approach to individual churches. The Government will finalise the set of agreements with the Holy See and formalise the state's relationship with other churches in a balanced manner.

The Government sees the non-governmental sector as an important pillar and component of free civil society; it will therefore continue to be open to partnership dialogue. It will endeavour to continuously improve the legislative, economic and institutional environment for the whole third sector.

The Government will pay special attention to the protection of children from torture and sexual abuse. The Government will promote equal opportunities in our society, including greater participation of women in public life.

The Government will continue to pay focused attention to the support for effective anti-drug programmes.

The Government undertakes to apply sustainable development principles by means of a development policy emphasising a balance between its economic, social and environmental dimensions.

2. ECONOMIC POLICY

A. MACROECONOMICS AND PUBLIC FINANCE

The Government will promote a macroeconomic policy focused on long-term sustainable economic growth, in particular through increased labour productivity, inflow of foreign investment, creation of an environment favourable for the development of the entrepreneurial sphere, support for a stable exchange rate, reasonable interest rates and transparent tax laws.

A natural step in the fulfilment of Slovakia's integration ambitions will be the entry into the European Monetary Union. The Government will prepare a strategy for the necessary steps leading to the fulfilment of this goal in close co-operation with the National Bank of Slovakia (the NBS). At the same time, the Government will take all the necessary measures to ensure that under favourable external economic conditions Slovakia meets the requirements for the entry into the EMU by 2006.

The responsible macroeconomic policy will rely on the continuation of a balanced co-operation between the Government and the NBS. The Government will continue to promote the independence of the NBS and support intensive communication with the central bank as regards the formulation of the economic policy.

The Government will make the rules for procurement and handling of state property stricter with the aim of applying transparent criteria for procurement, use and sale of this property. The Government will revise the current system of state property administration and introduce a model that will be more effective and economical for the state, the owner of this property.

Public finance reform

Public finance reform will be one of the most important tasks of the Government. The Government will prepare a comprehensive analysis of the public sector's debt. The aim of the Government's fiscal policy will be to reduce public debt as a percentage of Gross National Product during the term of office.

The Government will implement measures focused on increasing the efficiency of the use of public resources. In the first part of its term of office, it will concentrate on reducing the public finance deficit to ensure that this area is not a barrier to the Slovak Republic's entry into the eurozone. A policy focused on reducing the deficit-generating nature of public finance, combined with reforms in the most expenditure-intensive sectors, will create room for reducing insurance contributions and direct taxes. The Government will continue to decrease the degree of redistribution through public finance. The Government will analyse the possibilities for introducing uniform tax rates.

The key element of the public finance reform will be the introduction of stringent budgetary restrictions throughout the whole system of public finance. As a result, no sector will consume more resources than allocated in budgets approved by the Parliament or individual self-government authorities. By introducing strict budgetary restrictions, the rises in debts of various public sector institutions, such as railways, healthcare, STV and SRo, will be halted. The Government will seek ways to introduce legislation preventing the National Council from adopting laws with uncovered budgetary impacts.

By reinforcing the role of programme budgeting and clearly defining the links between the goals and costs of individual programmes, the transparency and efficiency of the use of public finance will be improved. At the same time, programme budgeting will allow for better assessment of the results of governmental policies in individual areas. The Government will gradually strengthen the importance of medium-term budget outlooks in the management of public finance.

The budget for the public finance sector will be drawn up using European Union methodology at all levels.

The Government will create legislative, administrative and control mechanisms for the effective use of resources from EU funds. These resources will form a part of Slovakia's public finance budget.

The Government respects the right of the self-government to own financial resources available to its based on its powers and responsibilities, while the volume of its own resources must be proportionate to competences. In this context, the Government will reinforce the status as well as responsibility of territorial self-government in the provision of services to people by decentralising public finance. It will increase municipalities' tax revenues and define higher territorial units' own tax revenues, while ensuring that this does not increase the tax burden on the population and undertakings. The Government will fulfil this goal by means of a special regulation (a law) containing the definition and structure of tax revenues for municipalities and higher territorial units and criteria for their redistribution to municipalities and higher territorial units' budgets. The law will help stabilise the revenues of territorial self-government.

The Government will level out the differences between municipalities and higher territorial units' own tax revenues, reflected in the differing tax strength of municipalities and higher territorial units, through a new system of horizontal financial settlement. This system, respecting the principles of fairness, solidarity and motivation, will be dealt with in a special

law that the Government will submit to the Parliament following the decision on the scope of competences to be transferred from state administration authorities to municipal authorities and higher territorial units.

The Government will present a new budgetary rules act and an act on the rules of budget management by territorial self-governments. Its goal will be to define the position, content and drawing up of territorial self-government budgets and rules for the management of budgetary funds, establishment and foundation of legal entities and operation of territorial self-government associations. The act will improve the transparency of the rules for the fulfilment of tasks transferred from state administration to territorial self-governments and extend the set of laws related to territorial self-government.

A part of the public finance management reform will be the improvement of the efficiency of the relationships between the state budget and other public finance items, such as the Social Insurance Agency, National Labour Office and health insurance companies. The Government will manage public finance as one whole, while accepting the specific position of local and regional self-governments, whose representatives were elected by popular vote. The Government will take steps to speed up the completion of the state treasury system in order to improve the efficiency of budgetary resources and state financial resources administration.

The provision of state guarantees under significantly stricter terms will be a part of the public finance reform. The Government will use state guarantees only in necessary cases, i.e. to refinance due state-guaranteed loans and if there is a threat of the application of guarantees using public financial resources. The Government will make it possible to provide the necessary scope of state guarantees for the financing of projects, should this simultaneously ensure the acquisition of foreign grants and resources from European Union pre-accession and structural funds. The Government will also ensure that state-guaranteed loans and long-term bonds do not substitute direct state budget expenditures. This major change in the provision of state guarantees will result in the gradual reduction of risks arising from state guarantees.

The Government will also apply a prudent approach as regards the use of privatisation revenues, which will be used exclusively for the reduction of public debt and pension scheme and education reforms.

The Government will create systemic legislative and institutional conditions to address the inter-enterprise debt and state and public institutions' claims related to this.

The Government will prepare a state debt management strategy, the implementation of which will reduce state budget costs.

To ensure a more effective use of public resources, the Government will continue to improve and enhance the public procurement system by applying new methods, such as joint procurement from multiple suppliers and electronic procurement. The application of these methods can bring both savings in the cost of the public procurement process and better transparency of the use of finance, as well as restrict the possibilities for corruption.

The Government will complete the system of financial control in state administration in accordance with the financial control act, with appropriate emphasis on *ex ante* control, as a system preventing breaches of financial discipline by state authorities.

Taxes and insurance contributions

The Government will encourage the improvement of the efficiency of tax and insurance contributions collection. A strict, fair and effective collection of taxes and insurance contributions will be one of the basic prerequisites for the reduction of their amount. The Government will concentrate on the reduction of tax frauds, in particular in the area of VAT and excise duties on alcohol. The simplification of tax legislation, in particular amendment of those sections of tax laws that are open to ambiguous interpretation, will help boost the collection of taxes. The Government will create conditions for the use of information technology and the gradual transition to the submission of tax statements, reports and property statements via the internet.

The Government will prepare legislative measures that will simplify the system of penalties in the tax area. The Government will modify tax legislation in the field of tax information and tax advice in order to increase the efficiency and discipline in the administration of taxes, improve the provision of information to tax payers and narrow the room for corruption in tax administration.

The Government will ensure the completion and interconnection of Slovak information systems in the field of tax and tariff administration with the systems used in the EU.

The Government will ensure additional taxation of property income should there be evidence that it has originated from other than taxed and legal income.

The Government will consider the possibilities for the unification of income tax rates for identical or similar activities, in particular if this concerns income from business activities of legal and natural persons.

The tax burden will be shifted from direct to indirect taxes. The Government will unify VAT rates prior to accession to the EU.

Depending on how realistic real estate prices become, which is a basis for the taxation of property transfers, the Government will revise the current property tax rates and adopt corresponding solutions to unify them.

Financial market

The Government will ensure independent supervision of all areas of the financial market, including the second and third pillar of pension insurance, thereby creating conditions for the development of the financial market, effective protection of its participants, as well as guarantees of its integrity.

The Government will continue to improve legislation for individual areas of the financial market so as to create conditions for the financial system's stability and optimal protection of financial institutions' clients.

B. SUPPORT FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND COMPETITIVENESS OF THE ECONOMY

The Government will support entrepreneurship and improve the business environment. The Government's goal is to simplify the starting up of enterprises, mainly by simplifying the relevant administrative process.

The Government will support investment inflow and thus the competitiveness of the Slovak economy.

The Government is determined to substantially decrease the degree of corporatism and, in this context, mainly analyse the need for chambers with compulsory membership and reduce their number, so that restriction of competition, in particular by restricting the starting up of enterprises, is prevented.

The Government will improve the transparency of subsidy policy rules and, at the same time, complete the implementation of the approved licensing policy. As a result, the process of granting licenses will become more transparent, with maximum emphasis on the use of the "entitlement" and auction method for granting licences.

The Government will revise the current method of promoting small and medium-sized enterprises, with emphasis on territorial self-government and cross-border co-operation. The Government will ensure better co-ordination between support programmes and institutions.

The Government will reassess the current method of applied research to increase its purposefulness and profitability and transparency of the use of finance.

The Government will prepare and implement a new concept for the development of tourism focusing on support for active tourism, in particular eco-tourism, spa and health tourism, agro-tourism and rural tourism, strongly relying on participation by territorial self-governments.

The Government will assess the system of support for exports and investment and propose changes in line with EU rules.

The Government will support voluntary environmental protection mechanisms preceding the subsequent investment in the elimination of damage, in particular the introduction of the environmental management and audit scheme, the ISO 14000 system and environmental product labelling.

The Government will ensure the introduction of electronic signatures. It will create conditions for electronic commerce and strengthen the public's trust in e-commerce.

The Government will carry out a revision of the appropriateness of competences with respect to the economic reforms under preparation, with a special focus on the effective

functioning of the state apparatus in the promotion of entrepreneurship and investment and in the conditions of Slovakia's integration into the EU.

The Government will propose an effective distribution of competences among state administration and self-government bodies and an organisational structure model able to meet the Slovak economy's needs and tasks arising from Slovakia's membership in the EU.

Preparation for EU membership

The Government will prepare a programme oriented on economic development and sub-programmes for individual sectors within this programme. The objective will be the full utilisation of financial resources from structural funds for the support of the country's economy.

The Government will ensure further harmonisation of Slovak legislation with EU legislation in the areas of consumer protection, industrial policy, small and medium-sized enterprises and energy.

The Government will prepare a common trade policy for Slovakia as a future member of the EU, including instruments for the implementation and co-ordination of Slovakia's external trade positions and its position in the EU's internal market.

The Government will prepare a liberalisation strategy with respect to the WTO within the framework of the new round of multilateral negotiations, in the interest of extending Slovakia's trade opportunities in the markets of new EU member states.

The Government will improve the current inadequate protection of Slovak consumers and products manufactured in the territory of Slovakia. As regards imported products, it will eliminate those that fail to meet the quality criteria or have not passed customs and tax clearance. The Government will prepare and implement a system for the protection of Slovak consumers and, by means of legislation, bring it to a standard corresponding with EU legislation.

Fight against economic corruption

The Government will adopt measures to minimise the possibilities for corruption and complete the control system focused on the control of the use of public funds, including funds flowing from the EU.

The Government will adopt measures that will prevent the possibility of subjective decision-making by civil servants in all economic areas. These measures will mainly concern changes to the system of granting import and export licences, including their administration and guarantees of the principle of transparency and public control in the application of licensing procedures by simplifying the administrative process, introducing the obligation to publish information on licensing proceedings and introducing of registers of licences granted.

The Government will apply the same approach in the granting of state aid and establish a register of state aid recipients and a register of recipients of other investment incentives.

The Government will ensure the full implementation of the relevant EU regulations in the use of EU pre-accession and structural funds, with a focus on the principle of separation of planning from implementation and implementation from financing.

Networked sectors

The Government will speed up the liberalisation of the market and create a competitive environment in the energy sector.

The Government will create conditions for the establishment of a market operator for trade in electricity, including transparent and non-discriminatory market conditions.

The Government will complete the deregulation of the electricity market (including prices) and create conditions for the adaptation of the energy sector to the new conditions in the EU internal market. It will consider the use of motivation rules for the utilisation of domestic primary energy sources, including the utilisation of renewable energy sources.

Administration and privatisation of national property

In compliance with the Government's policy aimed to downsize state administration, the Ministry of Economy will take on the agenda of the Ministry for the Administration and Privatisation of National Property.

The Government will complete the process of privatisation where it is economically advantageous for the state, while observing transparency and competition rules. The Government will see to the enforcement of state interests in already privatised enterprises with state participation and complete the second stage of privatisation in the healthcare sector.

C. TRANSPORT, POSTS, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION SOCIETY

The Government will create conditions for the rationalisation and improvement of efficiency of information systems and decision-making and management processes, so that administrative intensity is reduced by eliminating unnecessary, multiple and ineffective managerial and administrative activities.

The Government's objective is to eliminate the conditions and activities involving a risk of corruption in the field of granting licences. The Government will create an effective system based on the thorough implementation of the Plan for the Implementation of Licensing Policy in the Transport, Posts and Telecommunications Sector. In line with the experience gained in

the use of pre-accession funds and the expected utilisation of structural funds and the Cohesion Fund, the Government will create an effective and efficient system of internal financial control targeted at the elimination of conditions and activities enabling corruption, in particular in the use of EU funds determined for development programmes in this sector.

The Government will pay due attention to the processes of European integration in transport, posts and telecommunications sectors and create corresponding administrative and management structures with the aim of completing the process of approximation of Slovak legal regulations and technical standards with those of the EU. The Government will prepare and ensure the institutional conditions for Slovakia's effective participation in European institutions as an EU Member State and ensure Slovakia's active participation in supreme and working bodies of international governmental organisations in the area of transport, posts and telecommunications.

Information society

The Government is aware of the challenge of the information age. The Government will adopt effective measures to support informatisation of the society by resolving the issue of institutional support at the expert, administrative and legislative levels, within which it will ensure the optimal division of competences and thorough co-ordination of domestic and international activities.

The Government will promote the widest possible provision of information to the public on the operation of state administration authorities via the internet.

The Government will prepare an act on electronic communications transposing the new EU regulatory framework and ensure that it is passed prior to Slovakia's accession to the EU. The Government will ensure the harmonisation and standardisation of information technology and data structures with the aim of creating conditions for the interconnection of transport, posts and telecommunications information systems with the EU.

In the field of support for access to broadband electronic communication services, the Government will pay attention to reducing the barriers to this access, in particular by supporting the development of competition, effective use of the frequency spectrum and promotion of information society services in rural regions. We realise that the close co-operation between the state and private sectors is critical for the development of information society services and modern communication infrastructure. The state will monitor this process and, in necessary cases, direct and stimulate it by means of regulatory intervention.

The Government will create conditions for the concentration of competences in the areas of electronic communication co-ordination and information society development distributed among various bodies into a single regulatory authority.

Transport

The Government will place emphasis on the rationalisation of expenditure related to the provision of services in the public interest in rail passenger transport and public bus transport. The Government will require improved financial discipline and tight budgetary restrictions.

Every year, the Government will undertake to fully compensate the contractually agreed services in the public interest.

In the field of rail transport, the Government will support the application of EU directives and the creation of an independent Regulatory Authority and Notification Authority with the aim of facilitating the entry of other carriers into the rail transport market, improving the competitive environment and developing rail transport.

The Government will continue to transform railways.

The Government will introduce new strict rules in the fields of construction, rebuilding, renovation and maintenance of roads and motorways that will prevent the unjustified rises in expenditure, inefficiency and non-transparency.

In compliance with the adopted European transport policy, the Government will ensure the implementation of the objectives under the Updated Principles of the State Transport Policy, in particular as regards the realistic pace of modernisation and development of the transport infrastructure in multimodal transport corridors IV, V and VI; it will promote the development of the transport infrastructure in the less developed regions of Slovakia.

The Government will create institutional conditions for the implementation of the infrastructure development projects arising from the Sectoral Operational Programme “Transport” with the aim of ensuring the absorption of EU assistance provided from structural funds and the Cohesion Fund. It will continue to implement the projects within the framework of pre-accession funds, based on already signed financing memoranda.

In order to accelerate the pace and effectiveness of motorway construction, the Government will propose a mechanism and conditions for the entry of non-public resources and investment into this process in a transparent and competitive manner.

The Government will strengthen the position of self-governing regions by transferring class II and III roads to their ownership. It will simultaneously transform the Slovak Road Administration with the aim of increasing the efficiency of the transport infrastructure maintenance process at the regional level.

The Government will support the process of gradually upgrading the operational capability of transport infrastructure to the EU standard and adopt programmes necessary to ensure repair and maintenance of the transport infrastructure.

In territorial plans and urbanistic solutions for transport infrastructure development in Slovakia, the Government will place particular emphasis on intermodality and support the environmentally most advantageous modes of transport and adopt a programme of support for the development of combined transport as a part of intermodal transport.

The Government will prepare a uniform system for the financing of road infrastructure valid in the EU, while ensuring mobility and the improvement of environmental protection and introducing the charging of heavy vehicles in the first step.

As regards permits for carriage by road, a new transparent system is being implemented based on the principle of entitlement when the required criteria and requirements are met.

With the aim of improving the efficiency of the transport serviceability of the territory, the Government will gradually create a legal, economic and institutional framework at the national and regional levels that will allow for the integration of and closer co-operation between individual modes of public passenger transport (municipal transport, public bus transport and rail passenger transport) to maintain and increase its attractiveness as the basic constituent of the development of regions, while special attention will be paid to the resolution

of city and suburban transport issues with the aim of protecting the environment from the negative impacts of individual motoring.

The Government will continue to promote the development and liberalisation of civil aviation by creating an environment similar to that in which EU air carriers operate and creating conditions for the successful restructuring and transformation of airport administration.

In inland navigation, the Government will continue to implement the adopted international treaties concerning the improvement of navigation safety, as well as harmonise the conditions for inland and international navigation enterprises, including the development of transport and port capacity.

Posts

In the field of postal services, the Government will create further legislative conditions for the liberalisation of the postal market and continue to transform the Slovak Post Office in conformity with EU conditions.

D. AGRICULTURE

Agriculture, forestry and rural development form an important part of the national economy. The Government sees the sustainable and economically and regionally balanced development of the whole sector as one of the decisive conditions for the further development of Slovakia and maintenance of rural population and cultural character of the country.

At the same time, the Government is convinced of the need for the introduction of market conditions and free competition in the agriculture sector, while respecting certain specific traits.

Agriculture

The Slovak Government will promote the economical utilisation of the productive potential of agricultural land and available productive and human resources for the production of foodstuffs and non-food goods, while respecting the ecological requirements for landscape protection. The Government will support the improvement of efficiency and competitiveness of agriculture, the food industry and forestry, while taking sustainable development of rural areas and the development of human activities into account.

The Government will support the development of free trade in agri-food products and free competition in the agriculture sector, while respecting the specific traits of agricultural production.

The Government will encourage structural reforms in the interest of adapting agricultural production to the natural, soil and climatic conditions and the changing market conditions.

We will support the acceleration of the completion of legislative, institutional and administrative structures necessary for the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy. The Government will ensure the continuous transposition of EU legislation on food safety and quality policy and implementation of food surveillance requirements throughout the whole food production chain. We will place particular emphasis on the completion of institutions on which the transfer of financial resources from European funds is conditional – the payment agency, the integrated administration and control system (IACS) and the relating information structures.

The Government will ensure equal rights for all farmers to access state programmes so that their utilisation is as efficient as possible. We will increase the efficiency of controls and eliminate the still widespread misuse of state aid.

The Government will make a major revision of the currently applied system of subsidies with respect to EU criteria.

We will encourage intensive agricultural production. The Government will apply certain basic Common Agricultural Policy rules in the system of agricultural subsidies and apply certain elements of the IACS with more extensive support for intensive production already in 2003. It will use a transparent procedure for the approval of subsidies. It will substantially restrict the room for corruption and clientelism in state support policy by making information on subsidies provided available.

Land use and ownership

The Government will encourage the settlement of land ownership relations and the development of the land market.

After expiration of the period for lodgement of restitution claims and identification of original ownership relations to land (i.e. after 2006), the land of unidentified owners will be transferred to state ownership. The state will transfer the ownership of land not needed for construction or infrastructure of public interest to municipalities. The municipalities will offer a section of this land to legal or natural persons who farm on land and it will continue to be used as agricultural land.

The Government will accelerate and financially encourage the legislatively regulated process of land ownership settlement and prepare the process of joining of land plots and the process of definitive resolution of the provision of replacement land.

The prolongation of the period for lodgement of claims under Act No. 229/1991 Coll. on the Settlement of Ownership Rights to Land and Other Agricultural Property as amended will make the correction of injustices incurred prior to 1989 with respect to agricultural land possible.

The Government will promote programmes for areas with inferior soil and climatic conditions and focus on non-productive functions of agriculture and agro-tourism. The

Government will support the policy of multi-functional agriculture and its landscape-forming, environmental and cultural functions, and promote the development of rural infrastructure and rural tourism. In line with the European trend, we will support the extension of the share of ecological farming and bio-foodstuffs production.

The Government will abolish charges for the exclusion of land from the agricultural land fund.

Forest and water management

The strategic goal of the state forestry policy will be to preserve, protect and improve forests in the Slovak Republic, while using the principles of sustainable management and respecting all functions of forests. As a follow-up to the constitution of a properly functioning wood market, we will gradually phase out state budget subsidies for forest management. The Government will prepare and implement a project for the transformation of state forest management companies under the competence of the Ministry of Agriculture into a state joint-stock company established under a special law.

In the area of water management, the Government will ensure the rationalisation and effectiveness of agricultural activities by means of legislative and organisational measures. In the area of water supply and sewerage, conditions will be created for the support of development activities in regions lacking natural drinking water sources. We will create conditions to ensure the functionality and reliability of waterworks and related facilities by completing the early warning and notification system on waterworks with the aim of improving the protection of lives and property.

E. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING

The Government is aware of the differences in economic strength of the Bratislava and other higher territorial units of the Slovak Republic. Through its activities in the field of regional policy, it will create framework conditions to stop further widening of these differences and gradually reduce them, while taking into account the process of decentralisation of powers from state administration authorities to municipal self-government and higher territorial units. Regional development trends in developed countries are based on the utilisation of regions' internal resources. The Government will pursue these trends. The decentralisation of competences, finance and responsibility and good legislation will create conditions for self-government of higher territorial units and municipalities to be able to influence the development of their territories to a large extent.

Regional development

The Government will adopt a comprehensive medium-term programming document on the development of regions, ensure the preparation, negotiation and approval of planning and

programming documents on regional policy with emphasis on the improvement of economic and social cohesion and extend the application of the partnership principle.

The Government will modify the framework conditions for regional development by decentralising public finance and introduce a new, more effective system of financial settlement of the socio-economic differences between higher territorial units. Through these and other steps, it will create better conditions for national, cross-border and international co-operation at the level of municipalities, micro-regions and higher territorial units. Within the framework of cross-border and international co-operation, the Government will utilise the operation of joint inter-governmental commissions and support the reinforcement of cross-border and interregional ties.

The proposal of the financial settlement system will take the principle of solidarity and motivation into account. Financial settlement will concern operational as well as capital revenues and expenditures of territorial self-government.

The Government will increase the administrative capacity in the field of regional policy. It will financially support the development of human resources and institutional infrastructure of regions used for the implementation of a comprehensive regional policy.

The Government will revise the volume and effectiveness of the funds used for the project of publicly beneficial works. Based on this analysis, it will decide on the possibilities for engaging the private sector and territorial self-government in using them more efficiently or for utilising them within the framework of the village renewal programme with the aim of supporting small undertakings, reducing unemployment and diversifying job opportunities, especially in rural areas.

The Government, in co-operation with representatives of territorial self-government, will create a transparent institutional and financial proposal for the co-financing of regional development using finance from the state budget and EU funds. The proposal will include a control and monitoring mechanism for the effective use of regional development support instruments. The Government will place emphasis on the transparency, performance, reliability and effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

The Government will increase the provision of information on regional policy to the public.

Within the framework of the reorganisation of central state administration bodies, the Government will reassess the current sectoral approach to the support of regional development and submit a proposal for its simplification and improvement of transparency. At the same time, this will increase the co-ordination role of the construction and regional development ministry so that an integrated approach is applied in regional development and initiatives from individual participants are integrated.

Housing policy

By decentralising the competences, a substantial section of the responsibility for the development of housing was transferred to municipalities. The housing policy and preparation of land for housing development is first of all a role of municipalities. The Government will

continue to support the development of housing by creating legislative, institutional and financial conditions. Through further decentralisation of public finance, the Government will create better conditions for the implementation of local housing policies.

In accordance with the possibilities of the state budget, the Government will continue to support housing, provide interest subsidies for mortgages and support building savings in order to stimulate private investment in housing construction. To support the construction of new housing and renovation of existing housing, the Government will revise the current and propose a new, more effective system and consider a system of stimulating tax instruments.

The Government will adopt measures to deregulate rent by the expected time of Slovakia's accession to the EU. After this date, regulatory measures relating to rent will concentrate only on the necessary changes related to developments in costs. Through rent deregulation and legislative changes, the Government will create conditions for the construction of rental flats both in the public and private rental sectors.

The Government will continue to create a framework for the creation of an effective flat market by amending existing legal regulations, in particular in the field of flat ownership, and by increasing the transparency of the conditions for the administration of flats and housing related services.

Construction sector

The Government will continue to implement European regulations on construction products, create identical conditions for the introduction of construction products into the market by the time of accession to the EU and harmonise the technical specifications for construction products, construction planning and construction work.

The Government will support the achievement of European standards of construction, qualification of companies, energy savings and energy certification of buildings.

F. ENVIRONMENT

The Slovak Government considers the protection of the environment as the key instrument for sustainable development and a natural constituent of a sound economy based on the effective exploitation of resources and the integration of three interdependent and intersupportive pillars – economic, social and environmental. The funds used for the improvement of the environment are funds used for the protection of health and living conditions, as well as the preservation of conditions for further economic and social development. Therefore, the Government will support activities aimed at improving the environment, preserving the natural and cultural heritage, protecting nature and natural resources, and optimal land use, in accordance with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, environmental law of the European Union and international treaties.

The Government sees the improvement of environmental awareness and provision of information and the translation of the National Sustainable Development Strategy into key development concepts of Slovakia as a priority.

The Government will support the completion, use and further development of the Comprehensive Environmental Monitoring and Information System, including the introduction of the flood warning and forecast system (POVAPSYS). At the same time, it will ensure the provision of early and accurate information on the state of the environment and the causes and effects of this state. It will create legislative conditions for Slovakia's accession to the UN ECE Convention on Access to Information.

Institutional framework

The Government will concentrate on the implementation of laws and concepts adopted in the preceding term of office and on the improvement of efficiency of the operation of co-ordination, advisory and management bodies. We regard the completion of the process of transposition of environmental law and partial EU concepts, including the utilisation of its environmental programmes and mainly structural funds, as very important.

In order to fulfil the commitments arising from the integration process, the Government will support rationalisation measures to reduce the administrative intensity and ensure the integrated use of the existing administrative capacity in the environmental sector, while taking the real situation in the Slovak public administration into account.

We will unify common provisions of individual environmental laws and, as a follow-up, prepare an act on integrated pollution prevention and control, provisions on the integrated management of river basins and eventually an amendment to the act on the environment.

In the financing of environmental protection, the Government will build upon the Integrated Approximation Strategy approved under the environment chapter.

The Government will compensate past shortcomings in the financing of environmental protection by supporting such market mechanisms and economic instruments that can serve as a development impulse, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises in the environmental sector (e.g. the recycling industry), and by applying the internationally used "polluter pays" principle. It will consider the improvement of legal, economic and organisational conditions for the provision of funding for environmental programmes and projects, including the possibilities for EU programmes co-financing, as a matter of priority.

In the forthcoming term of office, environmental protection will be carried out at two levels – integrated territorial protection and protection of individual sections of the environment.

Integrated territorial protection

The greatest wealth of Slovakia is its biological and landscape diversity. Besides its scientific and cultural importance, it also forms a basis for the preservation of the country's productive ability (production of biomass, renewal of water resources) and is a prerequisite for the development of tourism.

Biological and landscape diversity require intensified care – we will therefore complete the network of protected areas, with a view to the protection of biotopes of European importance. The Government will support the creation of cross-border protected areas. Extraordinary attention will need to be paid to the Tatras National Park. The new Nature and Landscape Protection Concept will contain an economical system of management of protected areas, reassess their target state and propose conservation measures and programmes so that protected areas also serve the public.

The basic instrument of the state and self-governing bodies' environmental policy is ecologically based territorial planning that will translate into practice the interests of the comprehensive integrated protection of nature and natural resources, territorial ecological stability systems, together with ecologically optimal spatial planning and functional use of the territory, complying with sustainable development principles and applying the results of the legally required environmental impact assessment.

Species and territorial protection must also be more extensively applied outside specially protected areas. The revitalisation of wetlands, improvement of ecological stability of forest eco-systems, eco-systemic approach and support for social functions of forests, afforestation of uncultivated land and its use as bio-centres and bio-corridors, the reduction of contamination of erosion risks, etc. will contribute to this.

Protection of individual sections of the environment

The building of an environmental infrastructure is a necessary condition for accession to the EU. The most important activities will therefore include the construction of sewerage systems and wastewater treatment plants, as well as facilities for the disposal of waste and reduction of air pollutant emissions. The elimination of old environmental loads remains a serious problem and a priority for the Government, which considers it an environmental debt.

The Government is aware of the responsibility shared with EU countries for dealing with global air protection issues, the Earth's ozone layer and climatic changes and will promote the increase of the share of renewable sources of energy and monitoring of technology. Within the framework of the application of the Kyoto Protocol on the Reduction of Green House Gas Emissions, it will participate in the trade in emissions and, together with the developed countries, in the fulfilment of the commitments made.

The protection and economical use of waters will, *inter alia*, focus on the reduction of the rate of water outflow, anti-flood measures and integrated management of water basins resulting from the EU framework directive on water. The Government will endeavour to prevent destructive floods and the damage that they cause through the natural regulation of water outflow from water basins in catchment areas and other measures (e.g. POVAPSYS).

We will pay special attention to the sustainable use of mineral resources, the impact of their extraction on the environment, identification, registration and assessment of old environmental loads and slope deformations caused by this activity, clarification of the geological structure of coal basins in Slovakia and the advancement of environmental geology.

The Government will implement the Waste Management Programme and the environmental priorities for the forthcoming period will above all include the recovery of waste (using environmentally appropriate methods) and development of separated waste collection and recycling.

The basic premise for the elimination of environmental risks is chemical, biological and nuclear safety control. The most important task in this respect will be the implementation of the new act on the prevention of major industrial accidents, act on chemical substances and act on the use of genetic technology and genetically modified organisms, as well as the reinforcement and enhancement of the process of environmental impact assessment.

The Government will promote the development and dissemination of environmentally-friendly products and services and seek opportunities for supporting small and medium-sized enterprise to increase investment in “clean” production and environmental entrepreneurial activities by means of legitimate market instruments.

3. SOCIAL AFFAIRS

A. SOCIAL POLICY

The basic objective of the Government’s social policy is to motivate people in productive age to work actively and simultaneously create a social security system that would provide all citizens with solidarity resources to cover adequate living needs in the event of absence of income or material need. In all reforms, the Government will pay special attention to the degree to which the proposed changes help reduce unemployment and financial demands it places on taxpayers and to increasing people’s motivation to seek employment. The objectives of reforms in the social system include the reduction of its misuse, elimination of bureaucracy and suppression of corruption.

The Government’s priorities in the social area include the reduction of unemployment and improved efficiency of the social system. To achieve these objectives, we will prepare reform measures in almost all spheres of the social policy. We are convinced that only significant and systemic changes in the labour market, insurance payments and social system can reduce unemployment and increase the efficiency and transparency of the social system. One important principle is the clear differentiation between solidarity within the society and individual, albeit compulsory, saving or insurance. The cost of social solidarity will be covered using clearly identified resources. On the contrary, insurance payments will be an instrument of individual saving or insurance and should be strictly based on the principle of merits.

The Government will continue to enforce the principle of non-discrimination and equal treatment of men and women in practical life, especially as regards access to employment, vocational training, career promotion, working conditions and remuneration.

Pension reform

The Government will prepare conditions for the gradual creation of a secure and fair pension scheme built on three pillars and universal for all economically active citizens. The aim of the reform is to halt the demographically-induced rises in internal debt of the pay-as-you-go pension scheme and increase people’s influence of on their living standard in pension age. Contributions to the pay-as-you-go scheme will be reduced as much as possible, taking the state’s capacity to ensure that the Social Insurance Agency has sufficient resources.

The Government will prepare legislative and financial conditions for the establishment of the compulsory capitalisation pillar of the pension scheme. Individual saving accounts will create room to ensure that people can decide themselves on the time of their retirement in the future. The administration of assets within this system will be carried out by the private sector and the selection of the administrator will be completely in the hands of individuals. Companies operating within this system will be under control of an independent regulatory authority, with great emphasis on the safety of deposits. We will pay due attention to informing and educating people when introducing this pillar.

The Government will support the reinforcement of voluntary forms of pension saving and insurance. Tax benefits will motivate people to invest finance into financial products suitable for this purpose. In the field of supplementary pension insurance, the Government will prepare an amendment of the relevant legal regulation in order to eliminate the risks of damage to clients, achieve greater degree of transparency in these companies' operation and ensure independent supervision.

The Government will provide a minimum guaranteed amount of old age pension for citizens from risky social groups, who will be unable to participate in the scheme by means of individual accounts.

Social security

The Government will reassess the current social insurance act prior to its entry into force. We will propose changes necessary for the establishment of a modern social system. Our objective is to eliminate above all the distortions creating unjustified inequalities between people or introducing heterogeneous features into the social system, such as the non-systemic inclusion of spa treatment in social insurance. The Government will reassess the structure and competence of Social Insurance Agency bodies to improve the efficiency of its operation and achieve a better system of control.

The Government will take measures in the field of sickness insurance preventing the misuse of the system. The Government's objective is to transfer the provision of sickness insurance benefits in the event of short-term inability to work from the Social Insurance Agency to employers, with corresponding participation by employees. This will be accompanied by the consequent reduction of insurance payments paid by employers and support for the development of the relevant compulsory commercial insurance products. This will also create better conditions for the control of the eligibility of receipt of sickness insurance benefits.

The Government will also propose instruments that will address the problem of overlaps in social and healthcare services and their financing.

The aim of unemployment insurance reform will be to reinforce the principle of merits (insurance principle) and the principle of people's personal responsibility for their employment and social situation.

The Government will consider the possibilities of decentralising social assistance benefits with the aim of ensuring that the assistance is well-targeted and thoroughly controlled and that state funds are used efficiently. The Government will support significant intensification of controls and penalties for the unauthorised receipt of social benefits.

Unemployment

The Government will prepare and enforce measures that will increase the motivation of individuals to find and retain employment, in particular those individuals whose potential wage on the labour market is low. When taking these measures, the Government will pay particular attention to the long-term unemployed so that meeting their basic needs is linked with appropriate motivation to find employment. Within the framework of these measures, the Government will revise the role of child allowances and increase the amount of tax deductible items per taxpayer, parent and child, consider the introduction of child tax credits, place greater emphasis on the provision of social assistance using non-financial methods and the possibility of temporary concurrence of social benefits and wages, as well as other steps. The Government will define the upper limit of social assistance and support benefits for which jointly assessed persons are eligible. The Government will simplify the provision of several variously defined social benefits which will result in their targeted payment, with emphasis on a household's real cost of living. The Government will ensure the use of the principle of returns and project financing in the field of active labour market policy.

Bearing in mind the disproportions between individual regions in the development of unemployment, the Government will encourage labour force mobility by means of specific measures within the social system and interconnection of housing and employment policies.

The Government sees a flexible labour market, capable of responding to economic developments, as the necessary condition for reducing unemployment. It will therefore thoroughly analyse the Labour Code and the collective bargaining act and propose changes that will make the labour market significantly more flexible. The changes proposed will comply with European legislation so that they are not a barrier to increasing employment and economic growth and improve labour market flexibility. The Government will draft a new act on employment compatible with the European Employment Strategy.

The Government will propose reform of the National Labour Office and unemployment insurance scheme to eliminate or reduce its pro-cyclic effect on the labour market, reinforce the principle of merits, achieve better co-ordination of the labour market policy, abolish regional labour offices and strengthen the feedback to conditions on local labour markets. Within the framework of this reform, the Government will judge what combination of decentralisation and greater intervention from the labour, social affairs and family ministry will help achieve the above goals.

Family

The Government will propose the adoption of a new family act. It will propose a legislative solution for the protection of the rights of the child. The Government will support all forms of substitute family care, reduction of orphanages and their transformation into family-like models.

The Government will propose the abolishment of the substitute maintenance fund and address this problem through systemic measures, improvement of the enforceability of law and reinforcement of the legal position of eligible persons.

The Government intends to separate the provision of child allowances from financial support for university students, which will be dealt with through a special system of scholarships introduced within the framework of the completion of university education reform. The Government will consider to what extent this step can also be used for secondary schools. The Government will take every possible step to increase the motivation of parents and their children to study and properly meet the compulsory school attendance requirement.

Social services

The Government will ensure the implementation of the concept for the integration of the disabled into the society so that they can work and fully participate in the life of the society.

Special attention will be paid to countering fraud and corruption in all areas of social policy, in particular in cases of illegal work by registered unemployed, misuse of disability pensions and assistance, as well as in the field of misuse of social assistance benefits.

The Government will propose the transformation of social services using the principle of decentralisation and denationalisation of their provision. Public administration must define needs and allocate finance and private providers will provide the service. We will introduce new basic standards for the financing and quality of social services, a system of granting licences and control, and ensure equal opportunities for all institutions providing social services.

The Government will propose instruments that will address the problem of overlaps in social and healthcare services and their financing,

The Government will support and stimulate voluntary assistance to poorer people through charity and donations by economic instruments (especially tax instruments) and institutionally (through stimulating conditions for the establishment and development of non-state organisations operating in this area).

Decentralisation and efficiency of public service

The Government will reinforce the role of higher territorial units and municipalities in the provision of social services and engage them more extensively in the fight against misuse of the social system. In the implementation of decentralisation measures in this area, the Government will place emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity. The Government will enable self-government to play a more active role in the resolution of unemployment issues, as well as in other areas of state social policy. The decentralisation measures will be linked with fiscal decentralisation with respect to both the content and schedule.

The Government regards slimmer, more functional and less demanding public sector as a necessary condition for the successful administration of public affairs. With a view to the importance of the quality of public employees and significance of personnel costs, the Government will continue public and state administration reforms. The concrete steps should be based on the following principles:

- the principle of apolitical, unbiased and quality performance of occupation should be disseminated from state service to various areas of public service
- the public sector must be able to compete with the private sector in the recruitment and retaining of quality human resources in the priority areas of public interest
- we find it suitable to harmonise various regulations concerning employment in the public sector so that special privileges and advantages of individual groups of employees are minimised.

The adoption of an amendment to the state service act will, *inter alia*, allow for the recruitment of top experts by central state bodies with appropriate remuneration and eliminate the inflexibility of employment in state administration.

B. HEALTHCARE

The Government's goal is to create stable conditions for the operation of the healthcare sector, stop the debt from rising and ensure balance between revenues and expenditure in the whole healthcare sector. The Government recognises its responsibility for the provision of conditions for the best possible health of the population and undertakes to act in the interest of improving it; it will, however, also create conditions for increasing individual responsibility for one's health.

The Government declares its objective to increase the responsiveness of the healthcare system to correspond with the population's needs, while taking the volume of finance available into account. It intends to increase the efficiency of the use of finance determined for the provision of healthcare, mainly in the compulsory health insurance area, and, as a matter of priority, ensure the protection of individuals particularly as regards the provision of expensive healthcare services that cannot be realistically covered by an individual.

The Government will take steps increasing the effective availability and flexibility of healthcare. It should be based on a contractual structure between healthcare establishments and health insurance companies, equal opportunities and competition between healthcare establishments, and an elastic network, the minimum scope of which will be defined by the state. Greater economic efficiency of treatment and satisfaction of patients should be ensured by the reduction of pressure on the network of out-patient establishments and shift of the focus from in-patient to out-patient healthcare, home treatment care and one-day surgery.

Reforms in healthcare will be directed at more effective use of resources. The Government finds it necessary to reinforce prevention within the healthcare system, in particular preventive programmes for the early detection of cardiovascular and cancer diseases.

The Government realises that one of the problems in the healthcare sector and one of the reasons for the population's dissatisfaction is the high degree of corruption. The Government will therefore pay increased attention to measures to reduce the degree of corruption in the provision of healthcare services. People's direct participation in the financing of certain services or services related to the provision of healthcare will also have an anti-corruption effect thanks to its "targetedness".

Healthcare and health insurance

The Government will prepare legislative solutions for the basic healthcare laws. The act on healthcare will define “healthcare provided on the basis of compulsory health insurance” and “preventive healthcare”. The treatment code will define the scope and content of healthcare services, medicines and health aids provided on the basis of compulsory health insurance (the so-called solidarity package). It will also define supplementary healthcare and identify the method of financing and providing it.

The Government will prepare a new legal regulation on health insurance that will introduce two types of health insurance on the basis of the act on healthcare and the treatment code. The first of them will be compulsory health insurance founded on the principle of solidarity and provided by health insurance companies on the basis of a permit issued by the regulatory authority without limiting the number of policyholders, but with prudent control of solvency. It will be used to finance the so-called solidarity package, which will include the financing of the emergency network. The second will be supplementary health insurance, which will have an alternative in direct payments for the cost of provided healthcare and will be provided by insurance companies on the basis of permits granted by the regulatory authority. Healthcare outside the framework of the so-called solidarity package will be financed on this basis.

The Government will ensure equal opportunities and obligations for health insurance companies in both the compulsory and supplementary health insurance schemes. It simultaneously undertakes to ensure at least the same amount of funds from the state budget, National Labour Office and Social Insurance Agency for the healthcare sector as in 2002, in fixed prices. The Government also undertakes to enforce strict budgetary restrictions in healthcare to ensure no new debts are created from 2004.

The Government will define the conditions for the provision of social medicine services, including the cost of treatment and care of persons and targeted benefits and contributions to cover healthcare services outside the “solidarity package” and services related to the provision of healthcare to persons in material or social need for objective reasons.

The Government will set up an Office for the Supervision of Healthcare, which will strengthen institutional control over health insurance companies, with emphasis on the control of the content and scope of healthcare services purchased within the framework of the “solidarity package”, as well as control of healthcare establishments as regards the provision of healthcare financed *lege artis* from the resources of health insurance companies.

The Government will ensure that solvency of health insurance companies is controlled by the Financial Market Authority and introduce the obligation to pass independent financial audit for all healthcare establishments with a turnover exceeding a specified amount, which will lead to better transparency of financial flows in healthcare.

Other institutional and legislative reforms

Bearing in mind the extreme share of medicines in health insurance expenditure, the Government will support the implementation of a more open and economically realistic

medicine policy with a certain permanent participation by the patient, specified in advance. The Government will support the abolishment of the system of price ceilings and modification of the categorisation of medicines so that the “solidarity package” comprises at least one effective substance in each anatomical/therapeutic class. The Government undertakes to transfer the authority to approve medicines and health aids from the finance ministry to the health ministry to integrate the process of pricing and categorisation into one process, while applying the provisions under Directive No. 89/105/EEC in the categorisation of medicines to be included in the “solidarity package”.

The Government will prepare the transformation of State Treatment Institutes into public healthcare institutions and put emphasis on measures aimed at reducing or eliminating the risk of damage to health. The Government will prepare a new law on natural medicinal resources, natural treatment spas and natural mineral waters.

The Government will continue the process of decentralisation and create legislative conditions for a more intensive participation of regions in the ownership of healthcare establishments regardless of class or type, for the possibilities of purchase and sale of healthcare services (healthcare and services related to it), and for equal opportunities and obligations of healthcare establishments without restrictions on the type of ownership.

The Government will ensure that the Labour Code and public service act are amended to allow for differentiation of wages and mobility of healthcare establishments' employees.

The Government will prepare a legislative framework for institutional training of healthcare workers to be provided by the education sector, with the possibility of post-graduate training for healthcare workers at schools and institutions with accreditation for the relevant type of training. The Government will prepare a legal regulation on vocational organisations concerning their position within the structure of the healthcare establishment network and prepare legislative conditions to define the legal status of nurses and midwives as independent providers of healthcare services. The Government will present an act on healthcare professions and establishments defining the roles of providers and healthcare workers.

C. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Government realises the strategic importance of education and training for the further development and functioning of the society and for Slovakia's future in the community of European nations. The arrival of the information society and globalisation of the economy lead to a new perception of education and its role in the society. The advancement of technology and changes in the labour market necessitate life-long learning. Education is becoming the key for successful life, the best investment for the future, and effective prevention of unemployment, crime and drugs.

School plays the key role in education. Its role is to develop children's self-reliance, responsibility and creativity, while respecting patriotic and civic values. The school must become the cultural, sports and social centre of the general community in a region. Therefore, the Government's key and long-term goal in the field of education and training is to transform traditional education into a modern education sector of the 21st century, which, in combination with other components of the life-long education system, will prepare people for life and work

in the new conditions. The priority will be to implement the right to free choice of educational path and, through this, the creation of conditions for every individual to live a valuable life and be successful on the European labour market.

The transformation in the field of education and training will concern all its components, i.e. regional education, higher education, as well as the system of life-long learning, sports and youth.

The Government will support multi-source financing of education and its greater efficiency by means of per-student financing. The Government will minimise the room for corruption in education by encouraging the permeability of the school system as regards the passing of students to the next grade. It will rebuild the content and modernise curricula, with emphasis on improvement of foreign language training and acceleration of the process of informatisation of education. It will prepare a new life-long learning concept complying with international trends.

It will endeavour to ensure greater social recognition and differentiated remuneration of pedagogical staff at all levels, which will correspond with the standard of their work and importance of this profession for the society, so that this occupation becomes more attractive for young teachers.

Regional education

The school is seen as an open community of students, teachers and parents, whose key mission is to provide comprehensive services in the field of education and training to every family, and other recipients within the framework of life-long learning, on the basis of free supply of and demand for these services.

When working on the internal transformation and openness of educational institutions, the Government will build upon the vision contained in the MILÉNIUM project. The legislative basis will be a modern governmental draft act on education and training. The legal status of schools will be legislatively modified to make them more like public and self-governed institutions, which will reinforce their autonomous position and create conditions for effective co-operation between the school, family, municipality and enterprises in the region. The room for the differentiation of schools will be extended. The Government will support equality between all types of schools – state, self-government, church as well as private schools. The Government will prepare a partial treaty with the Holy See concerning education, which will build upon the framework treaty.

The Government will prepare implementation steps to rebuild the content of education and training, with emphasis on a two-level participation model of the content of education, comprising state and school curricula. Emphasis will be placed on the broadening of language training, development of computer literacy and communication skills. The reduction of ineffective information and knowledge from the syllabi and reinforcement of general education, especially at secondary vocational schools and apprentices schools, will facilitate the ability of school leavers to adapt to labour market requirements.

The Government will create conditions for a more effective use of the existing capacity of secondary schools so that, in principle, anyone who meets the prescribed criteria can study at

the type of school of priority interest. It will initiate the creation of national education standards, together with a system of monitoring for all levels of education and financial calculation. It will promote compatibility with EU countries in the field of mutual recognition of diplomas. It will create a system for state monitoring of the standard and quality of education and training in the last year of primary school, the outcome of which will be the decisive criterion for admission to secondary schools. It will introduce state school-leaving exams at secondary schools. At the same time, it will support professionalisation of state school inspection.

The public administration reform in the education sector will continue by reinforcing the trends towards bringing decision-making as close as possible to those whom it affects and towards school self-governance, with the aim of reducing the administrative intensity of school management and bringing the school as close as possible to people. The transition from centralised management to responsible co-decision-making will result in a new structure and communication between the education ministry, being the central state administration authority for education, and partners at all levels of management and administration.

Through a law, the Government will define a transparent, normative and motivating system for multi-source financing of schools and school establishments at all levels of regional education, including interest education, leisure time activities and support for youth and sports, without unnecessary distribution intermediaries and with a focus towards “school vouchers”. The Government will financially support the education and training of talented students, as well as disadvantaged groups of children, while emphasis will be placed on the integration of these groups into the society. It will create room for municipal and regional self-government to renovate school infrastructure and implement regional development of the education sector, including minority education, in accordance with the specific conditions and priorities of individual regions, with emphasis on the effective use of state funds. The Government will also transfer the competences in the area of school support services – methodical and advisory activities, selection of textbooks, specialised literature and interest literature – to schools. The Government will increase the amount of funds for education to gradually align it with the average expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP in EU countries.

The Government sees the teacher’s personality and professionalism as the key element for the development of education. It will therefore elaborate a motivational system for the remuneration and professional and career growth of teachers with the aim of improving the attractiveness of the profession. It will provide school headmasters with instruments for differentiation of teachers’ remuneration and room for shaping and improving teachers’ collectives.

The Government will promote pre-school education of children as a service to the family, while giving priority emphasis to the utilisation of pre-school education in the integration of Roma pupils and other disadvantaged groups.

The Government will also create conditions to provide education in mother tongue for the Russyn and Roma minorities and, at the same time, ensure that the standard of state language training improves. The Government will renew minority and church education units at the Ministry of Education.

Higher education

The Government recognises the essential role of university education for ensuring sustainable development of the society. Its key objective and strategic goal in this area is to create conditions for the effective functioning of the university education system so that within 5–6 years, higher education with a guaranteed standard of quality, corresponding with international standards, becomes accessible to anyone interested, who is able to prove his ability to complete it successfully. The Government will promote the advancement of basic and applied research at universities as the necessary condition for the provision of quality university education and ensuring sustainable development of the society.

The Government's basis for the achievement of these goals will be the continuation of the transformation of university education in accordance with the adopted concept for its further development, by which the Slovak higher education joined the building of the European higher education area based on the Bologna Declaration. The application of the European credit transfer system, the principles of which have become a part of the Slovak university legislation, will substantially facilitate the mobility of students and hence the enhancement of their university education.

Within the framework of the transformation process, the Government will concentrate on the effective resolution of the issue of long-term lack of funding for higher education and the thorough completion of university legislation, which will, *inter alia*, include guarantees of universities' autonomy necessary for their optimal functioning and definition of their obligations towards the society.

The Government will improve the situation in the field of financing by actively creating conditions for the development of multi-source financing of higher education, including the introduction of tuition to cover costs related to studies in both the full-time and distant form. The Government will also increase state budget subsidies for university education with the aim of gradually reaching a level corresponding with that in OECD countries.

Besides improved financing, the Government sees the diversification of the higher education portfolio as the decisive issue for the extension of access to university education. It will encourage the differentiation of levels of higher education with emphasis on bachelor studies, including the creation of conditions for graduates' employment and substantial improvement of the efficiency and scope of doctorate studies. The Government considers the establishment of high quality private universities as a part of the diversification and creation of a competitive environment.

The Government will pay special attention to the improvement of the system of social support for students, with the aim of introducing an efficient system of student loans.

The Government will place extraordinary emphasis on the support for quality university education. In this context, it will create economic and legislative conditions to support the improvement of universities' performance in the field of science and technology. The Government regards the proper functioning of the Accreditation Commission to be very important.

To overcome the differences in the level and structure of education, the Government undertakes to establish a university for the Hungarian minority within the first year of the term of office.

Science and technology

The Government is committed to the global trend that recognises and reinforces the role of science and technology as the primary source and instrument for increasing competitiveness of the economy, improving people's social standard and developing the knowledge base. It will place emphasis on the intensification and improvement of efficiency of the various forms of direct and indirect support for research and development to bring Slovakia closer to EU countries in this area and to ensure that science and technology becomes one of the instruments for Slovakia's integration into the European research area and thus into European and Trans-Atlantic structures.

The Government will ensure that the priorities of the whole society are taken into account in the support for science and technology, mainly in the implementation of state programmes, state orders and projects supported by the Science and Technology Support Agency. It will create conditions encouraging greater initiative from producers with respect to research, including the corresponding measures to support enterprises in the field of taxation and loans.

The Government will support the participation of research in international EU programmes, in particular the 6th Framework Programme.

Youth and sports

Building upon the adopted National Programme for the Development of Sports, the Government will create systemic conditions for the development of sports. In the field of sport movements, it will endeavour to support the development of sports to ensure that sport organisations can offer extensive and varied sport activities at a high standard for the greatest possible number of interested persons and that these organisations can generate sufficient financial resources to finance their sport activities through their own economic activities.

The Government will adopt measures to support the development of people's physical and sport activities, from sports at school, through recreational sports, sports for all, and amateur and professional sports, to national sports teams.

The Government will promote the spreading of suitable forms of sports and recreational activities and physical education activities at schools within the framework of out-of-school activities, as well as sport activities focused on the social and health aspects. The Government will support the improvement of conditions for training of talented youth, as well as the completion of the whole system for the development of talented youth.

The Government will create conditions for the preparation and participation of Slovak national teams in important international events with aim of presenting the advancement of Slovakia in cultural and social spheres, so that successful sportsmen become role models for the young generation. The Government will support the organisation of major sport events in Slovakia.

D. CULTURE

The Government considers the protection and development of cultural heritage, support for contemporary artistic production, as well as the development of culture in general as an important investment in the moral, intellectual, social and economic development of the society. The Government will prepare and adopt a state cultural policy concept.

The right of access to cultural values is one of the essential rights of all people. The Government will therefore complete and implement a package of legislative and economic measures to preserve and support culture in the plurality of opinion and its institutional and economic plurality and in the professional, non-professional, state, as well as non-state sphere, including the culture of national minorities, ethnic and opinion groups.

On the basis of mutual dialogue, respect and effort to ensure general welfare of the society, the Government will continue to co-operate with churches and religious communities. The Government will create a transparent system for the financing of churches and religious communities.

The Government will pay attention to the position of Slovak communities abroad and support cultural projects for their development.

Economic and institutional instruments

The Government will complete the public administration reform in the field of culture and carry out an audit of the Ministry of Culture and organisations under its competence.

By means of both direct and indirect support, the Government will create a stable and transparent system for the financing of cultural and artistic activities suitable for the various types of institutions and entities engaged in these activities, while the key criterion for the provision of support will be the quality of individual projects.

Protection of cultural heritage and intellectual property

The Government will create realistic conditions for the restoration, utilisation and presentation of immovable and movable heritage, with emphasis on cultural heritage localities. It will prepare a national programme for the restoration of cultural heritage called “Let's renew our home”.

The Government will improve the registration, protection and accessibility of collections in museums and galleries.

The Government will implement the objectives of the UNESCO's Convention Concerning the Protection of Traditional and Folk Culture.

The Government will ensure the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Slovak Librarianship.

The Government will create conditions for the thorough protection of intellectual property and related rights.

Media policy

Using legislative instruments, the Government will propose solutions for the financially and politically independent operation of media institutions providing services in the public interest. They will include the reinforcement of the self-governing principle of management and powers of elected and supervisory bodies of Slovak Television (STV) and Slovak Radio (SRo), as well as address the issue of the ineffective management, operation and increasing debts of these public institutions. The Government will prepare laws on STV and SRo, which will enact the establishment of a separate editorial office for Hungarian broadcasts on STV and SRo and extension of the broadcasting time, and introduce special broadcasts in Rusyn on SRo.

The Government will prepare a new media act. It will propose a system for the transparent financing of the media domain.

The Government will create legislative and economic conditions to protect and enable access to the audiovisual heritage, in accordance with the relevant international treaties.

The Government will prepare a concept of legislative measures and an economic strategy for the digitalisation of television and radio broadcasting.

Promotion of Slovak culture abroad

The Government will prepare and implement a strategy for the presentation of Slovak culture and arts abroad as a part of Slovakia's integration efforts. Based on agreements on cultural co-operation and other international commitments, it will ensure the presentation of foreign cultures in Slovakia.

The Government will support and foster active participation of the Slovak Republic in international governmental and non-governmental organisations operating in the areas of culture and art, as well as the implementation of international cultural projects in the territory of Slovakia and abroad, as an important part of presentation of the nation and state.

4. SECURE AND EFFECTIVE STATE

A. JUSTICE

The Government sees thorough reform of the judiciary, reinforcement of law enforceability and major changes in the state's criminal law policy as its priorities. Thorough

reform of the judiciary will build upon the basic objective, which is to create a judicial system based on respect for the principles of fair court proceedings and independent, unbiased and credible judicial decision-making without unnecessary delays. The achievement of this objective will require major changes at the institutional, organisational, procedural, status, material and technical levels.

Institutional and organisational changes in the judiciary

The Government will create conditions for institutional and organisational changes with aim of accelerating court proceedings and de-bureaucratising and improving the efficiency of court administration. The key project for the fulfilment of this objective is to complete and assure full operation of the Court Management project, which is based on the modification of the organisation of work at courts with the aim of taking the load of administrative work off judges and creating conditions for their decision-making. At the same time, the system is based on the informatisation of the judiciary and random assignment of court cases, which has a significant anti-corruption effect. After analysing and evaluating the experience gained from pilot projects, the Government will create conditions for its extension to all courts.

The Government will revise the system of court administration, which creates excessive load of administrative activities on judges, in particular in state administration of individual courts. The introduction of court managers will reduce the number of court functionaries with limited judicial powers. The introduction of higher court clerks will take the burden of administration of court agendas off judges, including the processing of simple judicial procedures.

The Government will reassess the structure of regional and district courts in order to reduce their number and with the aim of increasing the quality and pace of judicial decision-making and simultaneously improving the efficiency of the judicial system and making it substantially more cost-effective. At the same time, the Government will propose the introduction of delegation senates, which will make it possible to delegate a section of court cases from courts with a shortage to courts with a surplus of judges, while fully respecting the principle of the prohibition against the withdrawal of cases from a legally assigned judge and the principle of untransferability of judges.

Procedural changes at courts

The Government will prepare and propose procedural reforms at courts. In civil court proceedings, this will particularly concern the broader application of the adversarial principle in criminal proceedings, which will increase the responsibility of case participants for the result of the dispute as regards the execution of evidence. The current role of courts in the collection of evidence prolongs court proceedings and allows for breaches of the principle of impartiality of court proceedings. The augmentation of the adversarial nature of court proceedings will require the modification of records of court proceedings; the Government will also consider the possibility of extending free legal aid. In civil court proceedings, the Government will propose the reinforcement of the system of incomplete appeal and modification of legal remedies, improve the transparency of the area of non-dispute proceedings and eliminate the shortcomings of execution proceedings in the interest of reinforcing law enforceability.

The Government will create conditions for increasing the efficiency of trade registers, including the legislative and technical framework, which will lead to the possibility to submit applications in electronic form.

The Government will propose modification of bankruptcy and composition legislation and the regulatory framework for bankruptcy estate administrators.

In the interest of increasing the transparency of the operation of the judiciary and reinforcing the independence of the judicial power, the Government will ensure broader publication of court decisions, including on the internet, while guaranteeing the protection of human rights and particularly the right to privacy.

Status of judges

The Government will create conditions for the implementation of guarantees of judges' independence comparable with other European countries with respect to legislation. In the interest of increasing the professionalism of judges and prosecutors, the Justice Academy of Slovakia will be completed to correspond with the requirements for a modern training institution for judges, prosecutors, judicial and legal candidates and court employees. Great emphasis will be placed not only on ensuring professional readiness, but also the development of judges' personality.

The independence of judges and guarantees of it are one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is and must be responsibility. The Government will propose a legal regulation creating conditions for stricter disciplining of judges whose work has professional or ethical shortcomings. In this context, it will modify the mechanism for evaluation of judges' work with effects on disciplinary proceedings, consider a legal regulation on the principles of judicial ethics and initiate a discussion on the inclusion of the non-judicial (layman) aspect into disciplinary proceedings.

Criminal law reform

The Government will intensify its fight against corruption not only in the judiciary, but in the whole justice sector. The Government will propose the introduction of the zero tolerance principle in all legal professions. The criminal records of persons convicted of the criminal act of corruption committed in connection with the performance of their profession should never be cleaned. The removal of charges from the criminal record should not have the effect of reacquisition of "irreproachability".

The Government will prepare major changes in the field of criminal law policy. The objective of the re-codification of criminal law will be stricter penalties for the perpetrators of violent criminal acts and a modern criminal process, which will be swift and efficient. The Government realises that the preventive effect of a penalty will only be achieved when it is fair and swiftly imposed and executed.

The new philosophy of penalties will mostly rely on the new criminal law principle "three times and that's it", introduction of life sentences without parole, and elimination of the absorption principle in the imposition of penalties (increase the maximum prison sentences for multiple criminal acts by a half).

As a part of the reform, mediation and probation will be introduced into criminal proceedings, with the possibility of imposing alternative penalties, in the interest of improving the position of victims of criminal acts and greater variability of the correction of consequences of criminal acts related above all to negligent conduct. The introduction of negotiations proceedings between the prosecutor and the accused will not only reduce the burden on courts, but also create conditions for the use of "principle witnesses" to detect and convict persons suspected of corruption and organised crime.

The Government will also propose that the scope of criminal penalties be narrowed, because their current extent creates possibilities for non-uniform and often subjective court rulings as regards sentence rates.

Other institutional and organisational reforms

The modification of the philosophy of punishment and the fight against organised crime will require the creation of the necessary institutional, organisational, material and technical conditions. The Government will propose and prepare conditions for the creation of a special court and special prosecutor's office for the fight against corruption and organised crime with the aim of breaking up the ties between individual state and justice authorities at both the local and national levels and thus improving the conditions for independent and rigorous investigation of corruption cases, which are closely related to organised crime.

The Government will take the necessary measures, in accordance with the valid recommendations from the European Union, with the aim of achieving such a position of the prosecution that would correspond with the position of public prosecution authorities in developed democratic countries.

As regards prisons, the system for external and internal security of custody facilities and imprisonment facilities, in which special sentences are served, will be completed. At the same time, the capacity of prisons will continue to be extended without increasing the number of prison and court warden staff, with a view to the limitations of the state budget. The increase in warden services will be ensured mostly through the reassessment of existing support services positions.

Legislation and the legislative process

The Government will pay special attention to legislation and the legislative process. Besides the modification of criminal law, the Government will complete the legislative objective for the modification of private law and, as a follow-up, prepare a long-term plan for the gradual preparation of new legal regulations. It will prepare proposals to modify the key systems in the general section of civil law and align special private law regulations with the general regulation. The Government will analyse the effects of company law regulations and, if necessary, propose solutions to any shortcomings.

The Government will analyse the legislative process itself, with regard to its institutional and organisational framework, quality of the legislative technique and transparency of the whole process. It will place emphasis on links between the practical efficiency of legal regulations and new legislative objectives. It will rebuild the Legislative Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic to ensure its greater involvement in the technical stage of

the legislative process. It will also create conditions for the unification of legal terminology, which is a basic condition for the quality of legal standards.

B. INTERNAL SECURITY AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

In the area of internal order and security, the Government will thoroughly enforce the principle of respectful attitude towards citizens and non-compromising attitude to crime. The Government's effort to ensure citizens' safety and strengthen trust in justice and security authorities will be continuous. It will take all necessary steps to speed up and increase the efficiency of crime investigation, above all by reinforcing personnel capacity for the application of the so-called shortened investigation and by reforming the state's security system, with particular emphasis on the fight against financial crime. The Government will simultaneously emphasise and create conditions for improving people's awareness of their responsibility for individual and general security.

The Government will continue the decentralisation processes and complete the public administration reform.

Internal security

The Government will prepare and implement a number of principal measures in the system of people's and state security, with emphasis on the fight against financial crime. In particular, it will:

- reinforce the readiness and responsiveness of the police and other security structures for the fight against terrorism,
- create conditions for the establishment of a co-ordination centre for the fight against crime, which will be the central national contact point for the exchange of information on cases under investigation,
- prepare the gradual inclusion of justice police in a single structure, together with the criminal police service,
- prepare legislative and organisational conditions for the protection of judges, prosecutors, the staff of security and justice authorities and co-operating persons, who participate in the fight against organised crime,
- support the establishment of a specialised unit to ensure the confiscation of property originating from crime or illegal sources,
- create legislative conditions for the introduction of criminal liability of legal entities,
- ensure the necessary legislative and organisational conditions for the establishment and operation of a special unit comprising Police Force investigators and detectives that will closely co-operate with the special prosecutor and special court for the fight against organised crime and corruption,
- create conditions for the interconnection of and access to the relevant registers, as well as access to other information (e.g. financial, property, tax and bank information) for all state authorities engaged in the fight against organised crime, as a part of the development of new security information management,
- prepare a draft act on the use of technical intelligence means and a draft amendment to the municipal police act, which will increase the state's oversight of municipal police.

The Government considers the development of the National Schengen Information System and National SIRENE Office as one of its important tasks – it is a necessary condition for the Slovak Republic's accession to the European Union and the Schengen Treaty. It will place emphasis on the standard of protection at the Slovak-Ukrainian border, in particular its technical and personnel framework, so that this border line becomes not only a well-protected section of the state border of Slovak Republic, but also the European Union. The Government will enforce stricter penalties for human trafficking and create conditions for the completion of the process of professionalisation of state border protection.

The Government will prepare a new migration policy concept taking the Slovak Republic's future membership in the European Union into account, above all the fulfilment of tasks arising from the Geneva Convention, Schengen Treaty and the Dublin Treaty. It will create the necessary conditions for the implementation of this concept. It will ensure the complete harmonisation of the visa policy and the area of the movement of foreigners with European Union legislation. It will prepare an amendment to the residence of foreigners act.

The Government will continue to step up against all expressions of extremism and racially motivated and other violence. It will create mechanisms for the acquisition and evaluation of information and detection of these cases. It will create special mechanisms against the propagation of violence, including by the mass media, in particular television. It will pay particular attention to the protection of children from torture and sexual abuse. It will join international conventions on the fight against computer crime and improve the efficiency of the fight against environmental crime.

The Government finds it necessary to increase the efficiency of Police Force structures in regions, with the aim of de-bureaucratisation – reduction of the managerial and administrative apparatus and reinforcement of direct service.

The Government will promote co-operation between police forces within the European Union by allocating the necessary capacity of the Police Force and its participation in joint actions.

In connection with the implementation of the national programme and sectoral action plans, the Government will step up its efforts in the fight against corruption, while taking pre-accession process recommendations into account. It will take the necessary legislative and further systemic measures, including measures in the police, prosecution and the judiciary. This will mostly concern more comprehensive personnel work, more effective use of their own control and inspection mechanisms, as well as the application of new specific anti-corruption procedures. In the Police Force, the Government will introduce the obligation to submit property statements by policemen and their family members. The Government will continue to require non-compromising approach to all cases of breaches of law by policemen.

The Government will prepare an update of the national strategy for crime prevention and create legislative conditions for its implementation. It will adopt a system of financial support for preventive projects. It will support projects encouraging people's responsibility for individual as well as general security.

In the interest of improving the relations between people and the police, the Government will support active communication between police force members and citizens, with the aim of improving the credibility of the police. Regular meetings between police officials and the public

will be introduced to improve communication with the public. The system of performance evaluation in the Police Force will be changed into a system emphasising the degree of people's satisfaction with the work of the police. The introduction of ecumenical services in the armed corps will have a positive impact on the quality of life and work of policemen and their relationship with the public.

The Government will ensure the preservation of social and legal security for policemen guaranteed by the relevant laws, with the aim of improving and stabilising the Police Force. Within the framework of de-bureaucratisation, it will adopt measures to gradually reduce the police element in interior ministry structures (greater number of civilians). They will include the implementation of a personnel audit. The Government will guarantee a financial, material and technical framework for the police making it possible to fulfil the decisive tasks, in particular in the fight against crime and with respect to the integration process. It will support investment into technology to ensure the protection of public order and road traffic discipline.

The Government will continue to rebuild the system of civil defence into a system of tasks and measures targeted at the protection of the population, with emphasis on co-ordination of adopted measures at the international level and creation of support capacity for the event of threat or emergency, in particular extraordinary events and threats of terrorist attacks. By developing the integrated rescue system, the Government will increase the responsiveness of individual units determined for rescue operations. The Government will pay special attention to the creation of conditions for the operation of the Fire and Rescue Brigade, the central unit of the integrated rescue system.

Public administration

In the interest of completing the public administration reform, the Government will continue the process of decentralisation and deconcentration of state administration. The objective is to create a legal environment for the development of territorial self-government, which, through the delegation of powers and public finance, will be able to provide conditions for the harmonic development of regions, in conditions similar to those in European Union countries, and support territorial self-government initiatives aimed at intermunicipal and interregional co-operation.

The Government will revise the competence, efficiency and structure of district and regional state administration offices and prepare an analysis of their powers. On this basis, it will prepare new organisation of local state administration, within which it will enforce the reduction of administration, linked with the abolishment of district state administration offices.

Through the careful implementation of the public administration training concept, the Government will create conditions ensuring that the services provided by territorial self-government and state administration employees to legal and natural persons are at the required standard.

The Government will ensure the launch of the new registry of population. The new registry will create an information database securing the protection of personal data and persons, in compliance with the required standards for their protection, and ensure a more economical method of provision of information to state and territorial self-government

authorities. The Government will gradually delegate further Police Force tasks to public administration authorities.

C. STATE DEFENCE

Today's security environment is above all characterised by globalisation and increasing dynamism of changes. Globalisation intertwines individual processes, regardless of their geographical locality. No serious security event, anywhere in the world, is without impact on the security situation of the Slovak Republic.

After the confrontation between the two blocs ended in the early 90s, the effort to reduce the probability of an extensive armed conflict remains to be one of the typical traits of the security environment of today's world. However, the ongoing regional conflicts are posing a threat and the possibility that new ones could develop cannot be excluded.

But the greatest change in the security environment is occurring in the area of the so-called non-military threats, in particular terrorism. It is motivated by fanatic extremism and its goal is a global ideological confrontation with today's world. Some developing countries, to smaller or larger extent, co-operate with terrorist organisations of this type. The threat to people anywhere in the world has become wider and more direct and is growing increasingly rapidly. The new experience is that countries where terrorist attacks occurred received almost no specific warning prior to the operation.

NATO countries are adapting their security policy and the character of their armed forces to these new threats and the role of the armed forces in the fight against terrorism is significantly increasing. The members of the alliance are preparing changes in the political as well as military areas to fight against new forms of terrorism, supported even by some countries, and for protection against the potential use of weapons of mass destruction. It involves a quest for an effective response to the situation where the enemy and the location of the operation are unknown in advance and can be located even outside the territory of the alliance's member states. There is increasing emphasis on better protection against the effects of weapons of mass destruction and on substantially slimmer, tougher and faster armed forces, capable of deployment in more distant places and for a longer period of time.

The Slovak Republic is located in this global security environment. The degree of risk posed by the new threats is no greater and no smaller than in the majority of NATO Member States. The participation in collective defence against these threats will substantially enhance our country's defence capacity and is therefore a vital interest of the Slovak Republic.

Collective defence

The Government considers the North-Atlantic Alliance to be the only effective collective organisation able to guarantee the security of the Slovak Republic. It sees the attainment of full membership of this organisation as the fulfilment of a principal security interest of Slovakia and is prepared to fully take on its share of responsibility and the commitments arising for our country from NATO membership. After receiving the invitation to join the North-Atlantic Alliance, the Government is prepared to assess the new state defence framework so that effective strategic conceptual documents and legal regulations, as well as the

character and training of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, correspond with the requirements of collective defence in the new security conditions of today and the nearest future.

The Government will continue to support the participation of the Slovak Armed Forces in peacekeeping operations and operations to support peace and in the fight against terrorism, with emphasis on NATO-led operations.

The Government will support broader involvement of Slovakia in the development of the European security pillar – the European Security Policy and the European Union Defence Force. In this context, the Government is of the opinion that NATO will continue to be the central institution for European and American allies to deal with security issues of Trans-Atlantic dimensions. The Government perceives the European Security and Defence Policy as a way to increase the degree of European Union Member States' responsibility for security issues within the framework of the strategic alliance with the USA and Canada in the North-Atlantic Alliance.

Armed forces reform

The Government will support a reform of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic that will ensure protection from possible threats to our country and its citizens as effectively as possible. It will ensure that after receiving the invitation to join NATO, we will be able to contribute to the joint defence of freedom and democracy in Slovakia and other member states of the alliance.

The concept called Slovak Armed Forces - Model 2010, forms the principal framework of the reform, which the Government will continue to pursue. The strategic objective is to build small, high quality, well-equipped and well-trained forces capable to guarantee state defence and effectively contribute to collective defence within NATO. In accordance with this, the Government will continue to meet the priorities in the field of communication and information systems, air sovereignty, high readiness forces, lower readiness forces and backup forces. In the reconstruction of the armed forces, the Government will place emphasis on areas where the risks posed by threats are greatest with respect to scope and probability. Therefore, in this term of office, the Government will pay attention to the communication ability, training, armament, strategic logistics and sustainability of special rapid reaction units.

The Government will continue to enhance the defence planning system. The objective is to make effective use of all resources to ensure that the capability and interoperability of the armed forces significantly improve. The Government sees the defence planning system as the basic instrument for planning budget expenditure on security and defence of the Slovak Republic. The Government will allocate finance amounting to at least 2% of GDP for the needs of defence. The Government will ensure the interconnection of national defence planning with NATO defence planning.

The Government will complete the professionalisation of the Slovak Armed Forces by 2006. Only reserve enhancement service and extraordinary service will be retained for the needs of state defence. The Government will ensure the completion of the personal management system in the armed forces and introduce a career promotion system for professional soldiers. To achieve this goal, the Government will ensure that conditions are created in the armed forces for the development of an environment motivating and attracting

young people. The basic features of this environment will include quality training and education, comprehensive social security and career growth based on objective evaluation in a competitive environment. To mitigate the social impact on the released personnel, the Government will maintain social security for personnel unable to find further employment in the armed forces.

In the field of education and training for professional soldiers, the Government will complete the transformation of military education by developing it into a three-level system. Its basic components will include military training schools, the Academy for Non-commissioned Officers and Defence Academy.

The Government will endeavour to gradually engage our defence industry's capacity in European defence industry structures. When modernising the Slovak Armed Forces, the Government's priority will be to implement the approved long-term modernisation projects focusing on harmonisation of armament, technology, armament planning system and defence research with NATO Member States.

The Government will pay particular attention to the reduction of room for corruption behaviour and repression when corruption is proved. It will proceed in a way ensuring that the principle of transparency is observed and that foreign policy interests of the Slovak Republic are not endangered, in particular in the sale of surplus military material. The Government will ensure that the system of the use of state property in the procurement process is transparent.

The Government will enforce the principles of effective and civilian management of the armed forces. The process of increasing the number of civilian personnel and optimisation of defence ministry structures will continue. The Government is also interested in intensifying the co-operation between the sector and the relevant committees of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and non-governmental organisations.

D. FOREIGN POLICY

The Government will implement a reasonable and realistic foreign policy, the basic objective and principle of which will be to support the widest spectrum of interests of the Slovak Republic and protect rights of its citizens abroad. The Government finds it natural to preserve the continuity of the Slovak Republic's foreign policy priorities and is prepared to build upon the positive results achieved in this area.

The Government sees the attainment of membership and subsequent effective participation in the European Union and NATO, as well as the development of relations with neighbouring countries and cross-border co-operation, as its key priorities.

The Government will also pay attention to other areas of Slovak foreign policy, which include the various areas of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, human dimension issues, economic dimension of diplomacy, and optimisation of the diplomatic service.

European Union

EU membership is a strategic objective for Slovakia. The Government will do its utmost to complete negotiations with the EU by the end of 2002 and ensure that the process of ratification by EU Member States is successful, so that the Slovak Republic can take part in the European Parliament elections in 2004 as a member state.

Prior to accession to the EU, the Government will create conditions and the necessary structures to ensure the co-ordination of the process of decision-making on EU affairs at all central state administration bodies, in the interest of the active enforcement of priorities and national interests of the Slovak Republic in EU structures. The co-ordination of the state's European policy, which is a part of the foreign policy, will be ensured by the foreign affairs ministry, in close co-operation with other central state administration bodies.

Following accession to the EU, the Government will support reforms and measures providing member states with due influence regardless of their size, as well as the preservation of national identity in cultural and ethical issues and the Slovak Republic's accession to the monetary union. At the same time, the Government will ensure the adoption of the measures necessary for the Slovak Republic's accession to the Schengen Treaties.

The future shape of the Union is important for the Slovak Republic and it will therefore actively participate in the debate over the future constitutional and legal arrangement of the EU, with the aim of actively participating at the 2004 inter-governmental conference on EU reforms.

The Government will support the reinforcement of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and European Security and Defence Policy as a reflection of the EU's legitimate effort to align its political, economic and cultural potential with its international influence and responsibility for global development.

The Government will create conditions for a more effective and transparent use of European funds, within the framework of the pre-accession process as well as following the acquisition of EU membership.

The Government will create conditions for a successful referendum on accession to the EU, which will demonstrate continued broad public support for this historical step.

NATO

The Government sees the attainment of membership of NATO by the Slovak Republic as a strategic priority in the field of foreign security policy. After the expected invitation to join NATO at the Prague summit, the Government has interest in accelerated and smooth accession negotiations and the earliest possible approval of the Slovak Republic's membership by national parliaments of NATO Member States, so that Slovakia can participate in the forthcoming summit of the Alliance in May 2004 as a member state. The Government is aware of the fact that success of the ratification process is first of all conditional on the Slovak Republic's ability to meet the commitments made to NATO within the framework of the accession process. The invitation itself will not be a reason for self-contentment.

The Slovak Republic has the ambition to be a contribution to the reinforcement of member states' security and successful response to the challenge of the Alliance's adaptation to be able to face the new security threats and risks, especially the threat of terrorism.

After the Slovak Republic's entry to NATO, the Government will continue to support the Alliance's open door policy and reinforcement of the ties with partner countries. The reinforcement of the Trans-Atlantic link, which is the building block of security in Europe, remains a priority for Slovakia. The Government finds it essential to ensure that the Slovak Republic is a credible and reliable ally to other member states.

Relations with neighbouring countries and cross-border co-operation

The development of good relations with neighbouring countries will be a permanent priority of foreign policy at the multilateral level. The Slovak Republic intends to preserve the excellent relations with the Czech Republic, with a view to the objective historical and human ties. The Government will use every opportunity to intensify the contacts with Poland and Hungary and is prepared to actively participate in effective and pragmatic operation of the Visegrad co-operation.

The Government will pay special attention to the development of partnership relations with Austria, as yet the only EU Member State neighbouring the Slovak Republic. Permanent attention will be paid to the development of relations with our largest neighbour - Ukraine.

The Government considers cross-border co-operation within the framework of Euro-regions as one of the important forms of development of regional ties and, in this context, expresses its readiness to join the relevant international documents.

Other areas of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy

In view of its strategic priorities, the Government will focus on the comprehensive development of contacts with EU and NATO member states, with emphasis on traditional ties and key partners. In this context, the Government has interest in the further successful development of the partnership with the USA and in maintaining as good standard of the relations as possible.

The Government will foster the relations with transition countries of central and eastern Europe. Due attention will be paid to the development of relations with countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Government focuses on the most important countries in these continents, with emphasis on countries providing opportunities for beneficial co-operation in trade and economy.

The Slovak Republic will actively participate in international organisations, in particular the United Nations (UN). The Government confirms its ambition to attain the position of non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the Slovak Republic for the 2006-2007 period. The Slovak Republic will join the international community's efforts targeted at the resolution of global problems, such as the fight against organised crime, international terrorism and ecological risks. The active participation in international peacekeeping operations will continue to be a concrete contribution to the prevention of conflicts and preservation of peace. The Slovak Republic will continue to take active part in armament control processes,

disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical, biological and conventional weapons, including effective control of exports.

The Government's permanent task will be to support and reinforce the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as an important instrument of preventive diplomacy, monitoring of democratic development and resolution of crisis situations. The Government will support the Slovak Republic's representation in OSCE monitoring missions, which have proved their worth as a crisis management instrument. The Government confirms its determination to ensure the implementation of Council of Europe (CE) standards and will support broader co-operation between the CE and other international organisations. The Government will pay continuous attention to human dimension issues in the implementation of its foreign policy. It will actively participate in the creation and implementation of international standards in the field of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The Government will finalise internal legal norms in this area and thoroughly implement them in practice.

The Government sees national and cultural diversity as elements enriching modern civic society and, as a matter of principle, it will strictly step up against all expressions of ethnic and racial intolerance. The Slovak Republic will support Slovak expatriate communities abroad and develop relations with them to encourage their linguistic and cultural identity.

The Slovak Republic will take an active part in international economic organisations at the global level, in particular at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). At the regional level, it will focus its activities on the development of co-operation within the framework of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), Central European Initiative (CEI) and other groupings, which it perceives as a complementary part of integration processes.

Optimisation of the diplomatic service

In the interest of promoting Slovakia's economic interests, the Government will reinforce the economic dimension of its diplomacy and create corresponding administrative and organisational conditions and systemic measures aimed at integrating the effects of the diplomatic service in this important area. The enforcement of Slovakia's economic interests will be implemented at the bilateral level and within international organisations of which the Slovak Republic is a member. At the same time, the Government rejects state paternalism, which is a source of corruption and clientelism; it will operate within the legitimate framework of enforcement of state interests, provide strong support for Slovak exports and attract foreign investors.

The Government will pay attention to further improvement of the professional standard and stabilisation of the diplomatic service, as well as the systemic development of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the network of diplomatic missions, with a view to long-term foreign policy priorities. In this context, the Government undertakes to optimise the number and structure of diplomatic missions with respect to our future EU and NATO membership, which will be a further contribution to the overall commitment to rationalise and improve the efficiency of state administration.

The Government will prepare a legislative framework to ensure the effective operation of the diplomatic service, which should take its specific traits into consideration. One of the conditions for a highly professional performance of the diplomatic service is the implementation of quality personnel policy in the foreign affairs sector.

A necessary condition for ensuring the effective implementation of the state's foreign policy as a whole is the co-ordination and harmony between foreign policy activities of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and central state administration bodies, while the principle of responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its implementation should be respected. The Government will continue to make use of the proven mechanisms of engagement of non-governmental, scientific and academic institutions in the development of foreign policy.

III. INVITATION

The Government of the Slovak Republic invites all citizens to co-operation. Regardless of which political party they voted for in the September elections, we will be a government for the whole of Slovakia.

We invite to co-operation every person who honours democratic principles, wants a more effective state, desires responsibility and initiative to pay back and honours civic solidarity, and every person who rightly calls for justice and morality in civic and public life.

We, together, have an opportunity to write an excellent chapter in Slovak history. We were given the historical chance to unite our motherland and the fates of all citizen of Slovakia with the community of democratic nations and states of the European Union and NATO. We all share historical responsibility to establish a firm and respected position for our motherland in Europe and the Trans-Atlantic area.

The Government desires partnership and constructive co-operation with the opposition. Our programme identifies goals that are in the best interest of the whole of Slovakia and, to fulfil them, we intend to and will co-operate with anyone who gives a helping hand.

Slovakia has a reason for self-confidence. In the past few years, it demonstrated its strong commitment to democratic values and strength to deal with many problems. Our motherland has gained respect of the democratic public abroad. The Government will build upon the moral potential and determination of all citizens who care about secure and prospering future for Slovakia.